

First Baptist Church of Georgetown
27th Street and Dumbarton Avenue, N.W.
Washington (Georgetown)
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-241

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF GEORGETOWN

Location: Southeast corner of 27th Street (formerly Monroe Street) and Dumbarton Avenue, N. W. (Georgetown), Washington, D. C.

Present Owner: Trustees, First Baptist Church of Georgetown

Present Occupant: First Baptist Church of Georgetown

Present Use: Baptist Church

Statement of Significance: This Church is the first Church of the Baptist denomination in Georgetown. It was founded in 1862 by a former slave.

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III-PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The cornerstone of the present church was laid in 1882.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building is located in Square 1237, lot 805 (formerly Square 67, lot 119 formed out of lot 103). The following is an incomplete chain of title to the property. The references are to the Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D. C.

1830 Deed. December 1, 1830, recorded December 3, 1830 in Liber WB 33 folio 478
William S. Gantt

to
Benjamin C. Gantt

Part of Square 1237 formed by the intersection of the south side of Dumbarton Avenue and the east side of Monroe Street, along Dumbarton Avenue east to Rock Creek, then south to Gay Street, then west to Monroe Street, then north to beginning

1833 Deed. November 26, 1833, recorded December 2, 1833 in Liber WB 47 folio 516
Benjamin E. Gantt

to
Thomas Woodward

1864 Trust. April 9, 1864, recorded April 12, 1864 in
Liber NCT 31 folio 383
Thomas Woodward) first party
William R. Woodward)

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Trustees, 1st Colored Baptist Church)
Emanuel Watts)
Aloof Butler) second party
William Brown)
to
William J. Stone, Jr.) third party
Lot 103 in Holmead's Addition being in the Square
bounded by Dumbarton, Monroe and Gay Streets and
Rock Creek, fronting 40' on the south side of
Dumbarton 91'-6" on the east side of Monroe
Street... Recites that second party has purchased
above property and made payment for same...

4. Original plans and construction: None known.
5. Alterations and additions: There was some remodelling in 1904 when a new pipe organ and pews were installed at a cost of \$10,995. Since 1940 the interior has been remodelled and modernized somewhat, but without significant structural changes.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

1. Founding of the Church:

The First Baptist Church of Georgetown was founded by the Reverend Sandy Alexander on October 5, 1862. Prior to the formal organization of the church, Collins Williams, a licensed preacher from Fredericksburg, Virginia, had led religious meetings in Georgetown in private residences at the southeast corner of 27th and P Streets, 27th and N Streets, and then at his own home. Williams donated a small piece of ground at 29th and O Streets to be used for a church.

In 1856 Reverend Alexander came to Georgetown to start a Baptist church, but found only two Baptists in the community. However, he was soon able to find many converts and built up a large congregation that was greatly expanded by the arrival of a group from the Shiloh Church of Fredericksburg. This congregation erected a small frame structure known as the "Ark" on the land at 29th and O Streets donated by Collins Williams. The building was soon found to be too small and a committee of Brothers

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Henry Lucas, William Wormley, and William T. Brown selected the present site at 27th and Dumbarton for the new building.

Reverend Alexander embarked on a trip north and solicited \$300 for the new building; the members were able to negotiate a loan for another \$300. The cornerstone for the church was laid in 1882. Foundations were dug at night by the male members of the church, while the women cooked hot suppers. The cost of the stone foundations was \$800, which exhausted the building fund; for a time therefore, no further work could be done on the building. Finally Reverend Alexander himself took over the responsibility for seeing that the building was completed.

When the trustees went to make their first payment on the note to Mr. Woodward, he made out the receipt to the First African Baptist Church. The church trustee, William T. Brown, refused to accept this receipt, insisting that he represented the First Baptist Church. Mr. Woodward tore up the receipt and wrote another which was worded correctly. Brown had objected to being robbed of the honor of having set up the first church of the Baptist denomination in Georgetown.

(All above information is taken from the program published by the First Baptist Church of Georgetown for their Seventy-Fifth Anniversary, 1937, and their Ninetieth Anniversary, 1952.)

2. Reverend Sandy Alexander:

Sandy Alexander first came to Washington when he was twelve years old, stayed one year and then returned to Virginia. Two years later he returned to Washington and remained until the death of his master. He had been converted at the age of twelve and had also received some education in a school taught by Mrs. Charlotte Gordon at 14th and G Streets. When Alexander was twenty-five, he was freed from bondage. The following year he began his study of theology at the Columbian College. He was ordained by Dr. Sampson to preach in the Baptist Church.

Alexander had married while still a slave, and at one time his wife and children were thrown into the slave pen in Alexandria and offered for sale. Fortunately, Reverend Alexander was able to buy them at public sale and set them free.

The First Baptist Church was under Alexander's leadership for thirty-seven years. During this time he saw the church freed from debt. He also worked for the dead-letter division of the Post Office Department and for the Patent Office. In 1886 he retired from government service and devoted himself exclusively to the church. A street car accident disabled him in 1889, forcing his retirement as pastor. He died March 28, 1902.

("Began Life as a Slave," Washington Post, reproduction of an undated article framed in the vestibule of the church.)

3. History of the Church:

Reverend Alexander was succeeded by Reverend James H. Hill, who served as pastor until 1906. Because of the remodelling in 1904 the church was in debt \$7,665.53 at the time of Hill's death. Reverend Edgar E. Ricks was called to the pastorate in 1907; however, many members felt that he was too young to assume the responsibility for the church. These dissatisfied members left the church and formed a new church, the Alexander Memorial Baptist Church, named in honor of Sandy Alexander.

The Alexander Memorial Baptist Church first met in 1908 in the home of Miss Mary Lee at 26th and K Streets. Later, services were held in Odd Fellows Hall at 28th and Dumbarton. In 1909 the cornerstone was laid for their present building located at 2715 N Street, N. W. (Georgetown). The church is headed by Reverend Pryor, who came to Georgetown in 1900. He has been pastor of the church since 1941.

(Information on the Alexander Memorial Baptist Church is taken from: "Alexander Baptist Ends Annual Revival," Washington Afro-American, January 22, 1949, and Kenneth Dole, "Long Varied Career Recalled," Washington Post, January 27, 1968.)

The Ninetieth Anniversary Program for the First Baptist Church (1952) reports church membership at 642; however, because of the change in composition of Georgetown's population since that time, church membership has dropped considerably.

4. Pastors of the Church:

1862 Sandy Alexander
1902 James H. Hill
1908 Edgar E. Ricks
1914 J. R. L. Diggs
1916 James L. Pinn
1933 Marcellus N. Newsome
1940 T. Ewell Hopkins
1955 Fulton O. Bradley
1963 Wellington D. Abrams

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C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: None found.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

District of Columbia Deed Books, Recorder of Deeds,
Washington, D. C.

b. Secondary and published sources:

"Alexander Baptist Ends Annual Revival." Washington
Afro-American, January 22, 1949.

"Began Life as a Slave." Washington Post, n.d.
(Framed and on display in the vestibule of the
First Baptist Church of Georgetown.)

Dole, Kenneth. "Long Varied Career Recalled."
Washington Post, January 27, 1968.

Ninetieth Anniversary Program of the First Baptist
Church of Georgetown. Washington, D. C., 1952.

Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Program of the First Baptist
Church of Georgetown. Washington, D. C., 1937.

Prepared by Ellen J. Schwartz
Architectural Historian
Commission of Fine Arts
July 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

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A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This simple brick church is a free adaptation of Gothic elements in a vernacular form.
2. Condition of fabric: Both exterior and interior are in good condition. The outside has been painted red, and the joints have been painted gray; on the west side the joints as painted do not always coincide with the actual joints. To the south, two additions are visible in the brickwork at each side of the chancel, bringing it out to the line of the nave walls--but not as far as the "transept" projections.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This rectangular church runs north-south, with the entrances facing north on Dumbarton Avenue. The three-bay facade has two corner towers which are divided into three stories. Each tower has an entrance door at street level, and two windows at each level above. The central and widest bay contains the main entrance, a large lancet window immediately above, and a louvered opening in the gable wall above the window. At the west side, the towers again appear to have three floors (though in fact the windows are on stairways) and the nave section, two.
2. Foundations: Foundations are brick to grade. On the facade and the west side of the tower is a water table. Stone foundations are exposed in the south (modern) basement; the north wall is about 30" thick. It is composed of rough-cut blocks and slabs of stone, now painted white, reaching to a height of about 5'-10". At that point the brickwork begins.
3. Wall construction: The exterior brickwork, laid in common bond, does not appear to have any header courses (the red paint obscures the courses). At the northeast corner of the facade above the watertable is a white marble plaque which reads: "First/Baptist Church/of/Georgetown D.C./Organized October 5, 1862/Rebuilt September 1882." The west and east sides of the building are also common bond, but the pointing is much more crude.
4. Framing: Brick walls, about 20" thick at the base. Steel I-beams are inserted at irregular intervals in the lower meeting hall. Other framing is not visible.

5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: A narrow passageway runs along the east side of the church to the cellar entrance at the "transept" projection. At the southwest corner, by the new rear addition, a double iron door at sidewalk level closes a 3' x 4' opening into the basement.
6. Chimneys: Only one chimney is visible, at the northwest corner of the "transept" projection.
7. Openings:

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- a. Doorways and doors: On the north facade are three entrance doors. The center and largest one has a lancet enframing. This doorway is a two-leaf, four-panel wooden door, backed with 45° diagonal boarding. The top rail to each leaf is treated with a semi-circle. This doorway is 5', 8-1/2" wide, and is reached by two bluestone steps. A pointed stained glass window, depicting a jewelled crown and a cross fills the tympanum of the doorway. A brick pilaster on either side of the doorway carries a pointed arch; each pilaster is 12-3/4" wide, with a simple capital at the spring of the arch, about 6' from the top step.

The easternmost facade door is a four-panel double door of wood. The upper panel of each leaf is stained glass. The doorway is 6'-1/2" wide. Above the door is an inset I-beam lintel, decorated with three rosettes which serve also as bolt plates. The sill is concrete. The western door of the facade is identical to this, except that it is somewhat higher because of the street grade, and has a stone sill.

- b. Windows and shutters: On the north facade are two pairs of lancet windows in each tower, and above the main door a three-part lancet. All windows have shallow, flat brick hood molds, and stone sills painted brown. In the north gable end is a triangular ventilator opening with a flush border of radiating bricks. All windows have stained glass, covered with screening.

On the west side of the church, the lower meeting-hall windows are segmentally arched and have stone sills (painted brown), wooden frames, and shallow brick hoods. In the northwest corner tower, these lower windows are two-over-two; in the lower hall,

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six-over-six; in the "transept" projection, two-over-two; and in the rear (chancel) addition, one-over-one.

On the west side of the northwest corner tower are two pairs of lancets, as on the facade. The four side windows of the main sanctuary are double lancet, and contain stained glass five-over-two light, double-hung sash. They have stone sills (painted brown) and a pointed hood mold. The "transept" has one identical but smaller window.

Fenestration on the east side of the church is similar to that on the west side.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The north-south gable roof is covered with gray rectangular slates, and two bands of hexagonal slates of the same color. The two facade towers have hipped roofs. The eaves on the north and west sides of the northwest tower are broken up into pediment-like features. The towers are also roofed in gray slate. Over the choir and the rear additions, the roof is flat, with a metal covering, metal flashing, and no gutters.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Pseudo-machicolations of corbeled brick are closely spaced on the west and north sides and more widely spaced on the east. A recent metal gutter is a prominent feature on the corner towers. At the sides of the building, the gutter is hidden.
- c. Dormers, cupolas and towers: On the roof ridges of the corner facade towers, there are vestiges of a simple wooden cresting.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The first, or main floor, which contains the sanctuary, is about 7' above street level. The sanctuary measures 31' wide by 50', with balconies projecting about 7' on each side and about 5' on the north (a concave curve). North of the sanctuary on the west side, is a section about 8' deep which contains stairs to the street, stairs to the lower meeting hall and stairs to the balcony; and on the east side, stairs to the minister's study and to the balcony. South of the sanctuary is the altar table and speaking platform. East of these, in an arm of the "transept", is a small robing room, behind the speakers platform is the choir

area, or chancel, with the baptismal tank in the floor. At either side--in the new additions, at the level of the balconies--there is additional choir space.

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In the lower meeting hall, which is partially below street level, there is a Sunday School area, about the same size as the sanctuary above. The main stairway is at the north end, with a kitchen beneath. South of the hall is a space about 7' x 15'; east of this there is a committee room in the "transept" projection; to the west, a lounge. Behind the central space are a men's room (with stairway to the furnace room below) and a women's room.

2. Stairways: The main stairs from the street up to the hallway at the north of the sanctuary is a straight run, 6'-2" wide, with ten 8" risers. To the east is a half-turn stair with landing (run of seven, then ten) up to the balcony. There is also a narrow, one-quarter turn stair (remodelled) with landing down to the minister's study (run of seven, then six). The lower six risers are new. At the west end of this hallway is a similar set of stairs, a half turn to the balcony, and a half turn stair with landing down to the entrance landing (run of seven, then four). From this landing, which has the entrance door of the northwest tower, a straight run of eight risers descends to the lower hall.

All these stairs have square newels and posts, with simple urnlike tops, and simple turned balusters. The handrails are of oval section.

The stairs to the lower hall located in the southwest corner of the sanctuary are more recent, and are a half turn with two landings (six/landing/two/landing/ten). These stairs are metal, and undecorated. The stairs to the furnace room are an iron ladder-type stair at a steep angle.

The speakers platform and the choir area are all elevated. The platform is 30" above the floor, and is reached by four 7" risers at each side, with a 31" wide tread. The choir area begins three risers above this, where the immersion tank is also located. Above this level are two broad steps, 13-1/2" high and 33-1/2" deep. Modern 7" risers provide steps at the ends of these platforms. At the rear are three narrow risers to each of the side additions on the east and west.

3. Flooring: The main sanctuary is floored with 2-1/4" hardwood, with red carpeting in the aisles. The balcony is floored in plastic tile; the two side additions at the south end are 3-1/4" pine; and the choir area is 2-1/4" hardwood. The north stairs and landings have black floor tile, with the hall carpeted. The lower Sunday School room is floored in 2-1/4" hardwood. The new kitchen has plastic tile.

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4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls of the sanctuary are plaster, painted light green, above a wainscoting of grained vertical boarding which is 45-1/2" high. The boarding is alternately wide (3-3/4") and narrow (2") strips, has one bead, and is capped by a molding at the height of the window sill (which is continuous with this molding). The graining is very well done, and is well preserved and laquered. The stairways are also finished in match boarding, which is all about 2" wide. Although it is stained dark brown, it is not grained. Wainscoting is also found in the hallway. In the Sunday School room the vertical boarding has been replaced by mahogany veneer, horizontally scored. The molding here is 4'-4" from the floor. In the balconies the walls are plaster only.

The ceiling of the sanctuary is of pressed tin, in excellent repair. It is made up of a cove cornice molding in 4' sections composed of an egg and dart band, a cove section with floral sprays, and a bead and reel course. These are painted light green. The ceiling proper is composed mainly of 2' square panels, twelve across and twenty-six lengthwise. The main motif is a floral pointed quatrefoil with central rosette and with shield-like fillers in the corners. These panels are painted white. At the perimeter of the ceiling these are surrounded by a band of Gothic tracery sexfoil with an interlaced trefoil motif. This band is 15" wide (painted white) and is bordered by two courses of decorated molding 9" wide total, which are painted light green. A final border, 14" wide, in an elaborate checkerboard pattern (painted white) brings the ceiling to the cove molding. In the center of the ceiling are two different panels, 4' on a side, which seem originally to have been the centers for two chandeliers. This is also an elaborate Gothic tracery, the central portion white, the enframing green.

The ceiling of the choir proper differs somewhat in pattern. Two rows of 2' panels are in an elaborate Gothic tracery forming a pointed quatrefoil.

In the ceiling of the sanctuary are four rectangular anemostats and one in the choir ceiling. In the lower Sunday School hall the ceiling is acoustical tile.

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5. Doorways and doors: The sanctuary is entered from the upper landing by three doors. The center doorway is 49" wide and 6'-7" tall, and contains a five-panel door, wood grained, with original key plates. The east and west doorways have single-leaf, five-panel doors which are 35-1/4" wide.

In the Sunday School hall are two doors on the north wall. The western entrance contains a two-panel double door, which is 6'-4" tall. Each leaf is 19-1/2" wide. Identical doors are found at the corresponding location to the east. The latter area is now a janitor's closet; but originally--before the minister's study was created--it was the second entranceway. The kitchen in the center of this wall has a four-panel door. All other doors on this level are modern.

6. Decorative features and trim: The pews in the sanctuary date from 1904 and are made of oak. They have swag appliques on the aisle ends, with a carved cross in a stylized quatrefoil pattern, in relief, below. The ends toward the outside walls are undecorated. Pews in the balcony are plain, undecorated dark wood and are probably original. The balcony is supported on each side of the sanctuary by three slender cast-iron columns, fluted and with crude Corinthian capitals. The simple stained-glass windows are double lancet, with a small green plaque at the bottom of each for the commemorative inscription. At the top, between the two lancets, each window has a pane with a figural motif: in the east windows, a winged hour glass and scythe, open Bible, crown with lilies, cross and anchor; to the west, two tablets with the Ten Commandments (Roman numerals), a lily, a crown with a cross, and a harp. These windows are double-hung sash. Over the main north doorway is a pointed lunette with a roundel depicting a jeweled crown and a cross. The other windows are similar to the nave lancets--tall panels with floral and fleur-de-lis patterns.

The window and door frames throughout the church consist of wood strips with beveled edges and a central reeding; corner blocks have turned bull's-eyes.

In the Sunday School room, the windows have a simple 4" molding, with mitered edges. There is a small dais

about 7' x 15' at the west wall. There are also three roll-up partitions at the east side, which extend out about 17' or a little over half the width of the room. Thus two center bays are formed, each about 12' wide. All are open at the western side. The wooden panels, which run east-west, have a smaller doorway-like panel at the east, about 3' wide, with the main panel about 12' wide. When lowered, these panels would divide the room into four bays, all open at the side facing the platform. The hardware is marked, "J.G. Wilson Corp., New York City Order #79688."

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7. Notable hardware: The entrance stair from the main north door has a round handrail which is attached to the vertical boarding of the partition walls by attractive cast-iron floral brackets.
8. Lighting: All interior lighting fixtures are twentieth century. There is one small gas cock in the southeast corner of the rear men's room. The attractive cast-iron bracket, over each of the front doors, may be late nineteenth century.
9. Heating: The cast-iron radiators, used for hot water heating, have curvilinear decoration.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church is situated at the corner of Dumbarton Avenue and 27th Street, facing north onto Dumbarton. It is abutted to the south by a simple late nineteenth-century brick house, facing onto 27th Street.
2. Enclosures: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Walks: On the north the church abuts a brick sidewalk about 12' wide, and on the west, a concrete walk of about the same width.
5. Landscaping: On the west, in a narrow space bordering the sidewalk, there are shrubs and ivy.

Prepared by Daniel D. Reiff
Architectural Historian
Commission of Fine Arts
July 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

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These records were made in 1969 during a project to record 14 structures and a group of 16 items of "street furniture" in the Georgetown section of Washington, D. C. The project was conducted by the Commission of Fine Arts with the cooperation of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The resulting documentation was donated to HABS by the Commission and published in 1970 in HABS Selections Number 10, Georgetown Architecture: Northwest Washington, District of Columbia.

The project was under the direction of Mr. Charles H. Atherton, Executive Secretary and Administrative Officer of the Commission of Fine Arts. The recording team was composed of Miss Ellen J. Schwartz and Mr. Daniel D. Reiff, Architectural Historians, and Mr. William P. Thompson, Architect. The photographs were made by photographers J. Alexander and Jack E. Boucher under contract to the Commission.